III

The Narragansett Planters

"Historians have dwelt too much upon the differences in social life between the different colonies, and too little on the points of likeness. Let us consider, by way of illustration, the way of living on the Narragansett Shore of Rhode Island, and see how closely it resembled that of Virginia."—*T. W. Higginson.*

"More strictly, perhaps, than in any other portion of New England, could the term 'aristocracy' be applied to the ruling class of this region."—*Wm. E. Foster.*

"In 1780 South Kingstown was by far the wealthiest town in the State, paying double the taxes assigned to Newport and one-third more than Providence."—*S. G. Arnold.*

"All along the belt of land adjoining the west side of Narragansett Bay, the country, generally productive, was owned in large plantations by wealthy proprietors, who resided on and cultivated their land."—*E. R. Potter.*

JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY STUDIES
IN
HISTORICAL AND POLITICAL SCIENCE

HERBERT B. ADAMS, Editor.

History is past Politics and Politics present History — *Freeman*

FOURTH SERIES

III

The Narragansett Planters

A STUDY OF CAUSES

BY EDWARD CHANNING

BALTIMORE
N. MURRAY, PUBLICATION AGENT, JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY
MARCH, 1886

COPYRIGHT, 1886, BY N. MURRAY.

JOHN MURPHY & CO., PRINTERS,
BALTIMORE.

THE NARRAGANSETT PLANTERS.[1]

In the southern corner of Rhode Island there lived in the middle of the eighteenth century a race of large land-owners who have been called the Narragansett Planters. Unlike the other New England aristocrats of their time these people derived their wealth from the soil and not from success in mercantile adventures. They formed a landed aristocracy which had all the peculiarities of a landed aristocracy to as great an extent as did that of the southern colonies. Nevertheless, these Narragansett magnates were not planters in the usual and commonly-accepted meaning of the word. It is true enough that they lived on large isolated farms surrounded by all the pomp and apparent prosperity that a horde of slaves could supply. But, if one looks under the surface, he will find that the routine of their daily lives was entirely unlike

[1] The Narragansett country—properly so-called—included all the lands occupied by the Narragansetts at the coming of the English. In this essay, however, it is used in its more popular sense as the name of the land along the west shore of Narragansett Bay from Wickford to Point Judith. In 1685 it was detached from Rhode Island and placed under a government of its own as the King's Province. When it again became a part of Rhode Island it was called King's County. This name clung to it until the Revolution when it became a burden and was largely replaced by the term South County. In 1781 it became Washington County, which name it still bears.

As will be seen I have taken South Kingstown as the typical Narragansett town. This is merely because the records of South Kingstown are accessible and in an excellent state of preservation. I have examined the records of Westerly with more care but, for various reasons, have confined myself to a description here of North and South Kingstown.

that of the Virginia planters. The Narragansetter's wealth was derived not so much from the cultivation of any great staple like tobacco or cotton as from the product of their dairies, their flocks of sheep, and their droves of splendid horses, the once famous Narragansett pacers. In fine they were large—large for the place and epoch—stock farmers and dairy-men.

Narragansett society was unlike that of the rest of New England. It was an anomaly in the institutional history of Rhode Island. Indeed many writers have questioned its existence and it must be admitted that a descendant of one of the Narragansett farmers, or planters if you will, was not overstating the fact when he asserted that much of what has been written about his ancestors possesses "a Munchausen flavor." But there was a foundation for the existence of a state of society as depicted by Updike and Judge Potter, and the present paper is an attempt to show what that foundation was. I hope at no distant day to exhibit these Narragansett farmers as they still live in contemporary records. Before examining the causes of this social development let us dispose of one statement which does not seem to be well founded.

It has been claimed that the progenitors of the Narragansett farmers were superior in birth and breeding to the other New England colonists, and that to this the aristocratic frame of Narragansett society is due. I do not find this to have been the case. Nor do I believe the settlers of this particular portion of Rhode Island to have been one whit better born or bred than the founders of other Rhode Island, Massachusetts or Connecticut towns. The proportion of those who wrote their names in early Narragansett is smaller than in the surrounding colonies, and there were no common schools in the King's Province until after the Revolution. It will not do to lay too much stress on these facts. Still, if lack of education meant anything in the middle of the seventeenth century it shows that the fathers of North and South Kingstown were not above the average of New England colonists.

The later leaders of Narragansett society were, for the most part, well-educated men. The Updikes, who inherited the Smith property, enjoyed the teachings of the best tutors—men like Checkley,[1] the editor of an edition of Leslie's Easy Method with the Deists, and Daniel Vernon, an Englishman who was learned in the languages. McSparran, Fayerweather and Robinson are said to have possessed large collections of books; and we know that Colonel Updike, who lived in the middle of the last century, had a library so full of treasures that it could have been surpassed by few private libraries of colonial Rhode Island.[2] This refinement, however, belongs to the best period of Narragansett social life. It was a result of a peculiar social development and not a cause of that development.

Undoubtedly the most potent factor in that growth was the economic condition of the environment of the settlers of the King's Province. From McSparran Hill and Boston Neck

---

[1] Cf. Updike's Narragansett Church, p. 205, and Daniel Updike's Reminiscences in Updike Papers. The following from Updike, p. 208, will show under what influences the young Narragansett farmers were reared. It is from Checkley's pamphlet:

"*Question.*—Why don't the *Dissenters* in their public worship, make use of the Creeds?

Answer.—Why? Because *they* are not set down *word* for *word* in the Bible.

Question.—Well; but why don't the *Dissenters*, in their public worship, make use of the *Lord's Prayer?*

Answer.—Oh! because *that* is set down *word* for *word* in the Bible.

Note.—They're so perverse and opposite
As if they worshipped God for spite."

[2] The following titles taken almost at random will convey some idea of the range of this library. I am indebted for them as well as for much valuable material and many kind suggestions to Colonel Updike's descendant Daniel Berkely Updike now of Boston.

An exact abridgment of the commentaries or reports of the learned and famous lawyer, Edmond Plowden. Englished by Fabian Hicks. London, 1659.

Eirenarchia, or of the office of the justices of peace. First collected by William Lambard. London, 1614.

along the shore to the Champlin tract in Charlestown—a district twenty miles long and two to four miles wide—the soil like that of the island of Rhode Island is more fertile than any where else in New England. The Narragansett country is intersected by large salt water ponds or lagoons, which separated the cornfields of one man from the pastures of his neighbor more effectually than any fences could have separated them. Any one familiar with the difficulties of the early settlers as to fences will understand the great importance of this. Then, too, the soil and herbage were well suited to grazing, while a large portion of the territory was fit for sheep-walks, though good for little else. In fact a glance is sufficient to show how favorable these conditions were for stock-farming on a large scale.

This was soon recognized. As early as 1677 Capt. John Hull[1] wrote to one of his partners in the Pettasquamscot Purchase that he had sometimes thought that if a good stone wall was built across the northern end of Point Judith Neck, so that

---

The dialogue in English betweene a Doctor of Diuinitie and a Student in the Lawes of England. 1593.

Guliel[mi] Johnsoni, Chym[ici] Lexicon Chymicum. Francof[orti] et Lipsiæ, MDCLXXIIX.

Sacro-sanctum Novum Testamentum Domini servatoris nostri Jesu Christi. Londini, CIↃIXIIII.

ΤΗΣ 'ΟΜΗΡΟΥ 'ΙΑΙΑΔΟΣ. Cantabrigiæ, 1686.

The Iliad. Translated by Alexander Pope.

The works of Hesiod. Translated from the Greek by Mr. Cooke. 2d ed. London, 1743.

Theognidis Megarensis [Opera]. Lipsiæ, 1520.

The works of Virgil. J. Trapp, editor. London, 1735.

Works of Sallust. London, 1715.

C. Julii Cæsaris quæ extant. Londini, 1739.

Works of Tacitus. London, 1737.

Terence's Comedies, translated into English. London, 1734.

P. Ovidii Nasonis Metamorphoseon libri XV. Londini, 1719.

Des[iderii] Erasmi Rot[erodami] Colloquia familiaria.

Dialogues, French and English, (from Moliere). London, 1767.

[1] American Antiquarian Soc. Coll., III., p. 127.

no mongrel breed could come among them, that they might raise a breed of large and fair mares and horses which in time would prove a valuable article of export to the West Indies. His proposal was probably carried into effect, for a few years later Hull wrote to William Heffernan accusing him of horse-stealing. Hull drily offered to give Heffernan some horses that he might have no further excuse for thieving. A few years later horses were so plentiful that special regulations as to their registration were found necessary, and in 1686 Dudley[1] and his associates ordered thirty of them to be seized and sold, the proceeds to pay for the building of a jail. Whether these horses were the progenitors of the Narragansett pacer, whose origin is still obscure, may well be doubted. One tradition states that William Robinson imported the first pacing horse from Spain, while another is to the effect that Old Snip, the ancestor of the Narragansett pacer, was found among the wild horses on Point Judith. Whatever their origin, these pacing horses formed a very valuable article of export to the sugar islands, where they were held in great estimation.[2]

Sheep were raised in large quantities. Their wool was worked up at home, and also seems to have been used to a considerable extent outside the Narragansett country. But it was from their dairies that the greatest profit was made. The herds of cows which the great farmers left behind to be inventoried were very large. Mrs. Richard Smith brought

---

[1] Fones Records, near end of volume. The record of the Court held by Dudley in 1686 is incomplete in Potter's Early History of Narragansett, p. 239, and in 1 Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., V., p. 246.

[2] The roads in early Narragansett, were so bad that the riding horse was the great vehicle of transportation. Wheeled conveyances were introduced at an early day, for in McSparran's Journal, I find under date of Sunday Oct. 14th, 1744: "Returned in my chair drawn by Mr. Updike's chaise-horse Old Joe." On Sept. 24th, he had "visited Abigail Samson, a rich mustee—went and came through the River safe in my chair. O God to thee be the praise of all my preservations." This Journal is very fragmentary. It has only recently been brought to light and is now in the possession of the Diocese of Rhode Island.

the recipe for Cheshire cheese with her and the cheese of Narragansett was at one time famous in New England, and also formed an important article of export.

It would be unsafe to assert that without slave labor stock-farming on an extensive scale would have been impossible in colonial New England, yet it is difficult to see in what other way the necessary labor could have been procured. At all events slavery, both negro and Indian, reached a development in colonial Narragansett unusual in the colonies north of Mason and Dixon's line. In 1730 South Kingstown contained 965 whites, 333 negroes and 223 Indians. Eighteen years later the proportion was nearly the same: 1,405 whites, 380 negroes and 193 Indians.[1] Undoubtedly a few of these negroes and Indians were free, but then the indented servants (practically slaves for a term of years), here reckoned among the whites, were probably sufficient in number to more than balance the free negroes and Indians. The proportion then of slave to free was between one-half and one-third, a proportion to be found nowhere else in New England.

One of the surest indications of slavery on a (proportionally) large scale is to be found in the strictness of the slave code; and the slave code of Rhode Island, supplemented by the by-laws of South Kingstown, was by no means a mild one. The following is merely a summary: (1704, 1750) No negroes or Indians—freemen or slaves—to be abroad after nine at night, on penalty of not exceeding 15 stripes; (1704, 1750) No house-keeper to entertain a negro or Indian slave without consent of owner first obtained; (1750) No house-keeper to suffer any servant or slave to have any dancing, gaming, or diversion of any kind, on penalty of £50 or one month's imprisonment—if the host was a free negro or Indian, he, she, or they should no longer be suffered to keep house, but

[1] Census of 1730, in Potter, p. 114; census of 1748, in R. I. Col. Rec., V. p. 270. South Kingstown is taken as the town where the Narragansett planters ruled supreme.

should be "dispossessed of his, her, or their, house or houses, and shall be put into some private family to work for his or their living, for the space of one whole year, the wages accruing by said service to be for the benefit of the town." (1714) Any one could seize a suspected colored person found abroad after nine; and (1714) no ferryman could transport a negro without a certificate from owner or justice.[1]

The earlier laws did not seem strict enough in the eyes of the rulers of South Kingstown, and they made a by-law to the effect that if any negro slave be found at any negro house or cottage, both slave and free negro should be whipped. In 1726 they also prohibited the negroes and Indians from holding any more social gatherings out of doors.

For theft a white man was tried in those old days at the General Court of Trials,[2] but (1718) a slave suspected of theft could be convicted by two Justices of the Peace—apparently without a jury—and sentenced "as fully and effectually, by whipping, banishing, etc., as the General Court of Tryals . . have been authorized, used, or accustomed to do."[3] The slave owner could appeal, but only if he gave bonds to prosecute the appeal. No (1750) liquor, not even cider, could be sold to a slave, and (1750) no one could sell to a slave without the master's permission, "or otherwise trade, so as to receive anything from a slave," on penalty of ten pounds. The South Kingstown people supplemented the law against stealing by the following by-law which I give in full: "Whereas it hath been found very prejudicial in this town by negroes keeping of creaters as there own it is therefore voted that for the

[1] There was, strictly speaking, no slave code in Rhode Island. The laws cited here will be found on pages 35, 49, 50, 77, 113 of an edition of Acts and Laws of Rhode Island, printed at Newport by the Widow Franklin, in 1745; and also on p. 93 of a supplement which is in the Harvard College library. I have given the year of the statutes in the text and no trouble should be experienced in looking them up. The by-laws of South Kingstown are taken from the records of that town.

[2] Acts and Laws as above, p. 117.

[3] Ibid., p. 77.

futur no negro nor there wifes or pretended wives nor any that shall live under them shall not keep any stock of creatures in this town of any sort," under penalty of 31 lashes.

These laws and by-laws are mentioned merely as showing that the rulers deemed it necessary to prevent any conspiracy among the slaves, and also were annoyed by their thieving propensities. This development of slavery for the time being bred habits of command and independence among the slave-owning class and no doubt contributed much to the exclusiveness of Narragansett society.

The Narragansett country was owned by a comparatively small number of persons and this contributed to the production of an aristocracy in two ways. It made farming on a large scale possible and it gave all political power to a few persons, as in Rhode Island only freeholders could vote. There was no peculiar land system in the colony, but the King's Province was colonized in a different way from any other portion of New England. The rest of Rhode Island and the neighboring colonies had been settled by communities, though in the case of the four earliest Rhode Island towns, their settlement was very much less a matter of deliberate purpose than in the other colonies. The Narragansett country was the scene of the rivalries of two land companies and besides for half a century it was a bone of contention between Connecticut and Rhode Island.

The first speculators in the field were originally five in number—John Hull of Pine-tree shilling fame among them. They were with that conspicuous exception Rhode Islanders, and they purchased the lands about Pettasquamscot Rock[1] with

[1] As to the Pettasquamscot Purchase see Potter, R. I. Hist. Soc. Coll., III., pp. 275–299; Arnold, *passim;* cf. also Brinley's Brief Account of the several settlements in and about the Lands of the Narragansett Bay, in 1 Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., V., pp. 216–220. The evidence in the lawsuit about the "Ministerial land" in Torrey Papers contains much bearing on the early history of this company. In Hull's letter book and Sewall's letter book are many letters relating to this business. Sewall's first wife was Hull's daughter and the property thus came into the Sewall family.

the full countenance of the Rhode Island authorities. Owing to the number of Indians whose consent was necessary they did not obtain a complete title—so far as the Indians could give one—until 1660.[1]

The second and more important company was composed of Humphrey Atherton and his associates: John Winthrop of Connecticut, Simon Bradstreet, Daniel Denison, Josiah Winslow, Thomas Willett, Edward Hutchinson, William Hudson, Amos Richardson, the two Richard Smiths, the two Stantons, etc. They were all anti-Rhode Islanders in spirit[2] and with a few notable exceptions in 1660 residents of Massachusetts or Connecticut. In 1659 Atherton bought the lands about Smith's trading house in Wickford and a year later, in consideration of his discharging a mortgage which the Narragansetts had given Connecticut of all their unsold lands, those lands were mortgaged to the Atherton associates. The natives could not raise the sum required under this latter mortgage. It was foreclosed and formal possession taken, although the leading members of the Atherton company agreed, between themselves, not to enter upon the lands so obtained in the immediate future.[3]

---

[1] It seems not improbable that the whole subject of landholding among the New England Indians has been entirely misunderstood. Cf. Henry C. Dorr's valuable essay on The Narragansetts in R. I. Hist. Soc. Coll., VII., pp. 137–237. Especially pp. 158, 163–66, and 168.

[2] If anyone thinks that I have gone too far in ascribing anti-Rhode Island spirit to the Smiths and Stantons let him read the letter signed by them in the Trumbull Papers (5 Mass. Hist. Soc. Coll., IX., p. 27). As the book is not everywhere accessible I quote a few sentences: "For Rhode Island is (pardon necessity's word of truth) a rodde to those that love to live in order —a road, refuge, asylum, to evil livers. . . The public rolls record what malefactors, what capital offenders, have found it their unhallowed sanctuary. . . . They make religion the Indian's scorn by working and drinking on the Lord's Day," etc. This letter is signed it will be observed by the two Smiths, father and son, and by the elder and younger Stantons.

[3] The important papers relating to these purchases by Atherton and his associates are to be found in Potter's Early History of Narragansett (R. I. Hist. Soc. Coll., Vol. III); in the first part of the volume entitled Trumbull

These two purchases included the land bought by Hull and his Rhode Island friends, but after much dispute the matter was amicably settled by arbitration in 1679. The opposition of the Rhode Island colony was not so easily appeased. There is no room here to thoroughly elucidate this question, but the following brief summary will show the nature of the controversy. The jurisdiction over the Narragansett country was claimed by both Connecticut and Rhode Island. If, in the end, the former should be successful, the Atherton purchases would be sustained. If, however, Rhode Island could make good her claim, then the first of these purchases would be null and void, as having been made in direct opposition to a law of that colony passed two years before the date of the first deed. The original mortgage had been made to Connecticut, which, in case Rhode Island was successful, would be a foreign jurisdiction and the mortgage would therefore be void in Rhode Island law. As may be supposed the contest between Rhode Island, on the one hand, and Connecticut and the Atherton Company, on the other, was long and bitter.[1]

Papers, recently published by the Mass. Hist. Soc. as Vol. IX of the 5th series of their collections; in the so-called "Fones Records" now in the office of the Rhode Island Secretary of State; and in a manuscript labelled "Proceedings about the Narragansett Lands" now in the possession of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

[1] I hope before long to have something further to say concerning the Atherton Company and the history of the dispute. For the present, reference is made to Clarence W. Bowen's "Boundary Disputes of Connecticut," where the question is treated from a Connecticut standpoint. It is greatly to be desired that Mr. Bowen's example should be followed by other students of American history, as the constitutional and political history of the several States seems to be receiving far less attention than it deserves. In the Introduction to Updike's "Narragansett Church," there is an account of the controversy, and Judge Potter's "Early History of Narragansett" is in reality a history of the dispute. Owing to defects in form and also to the fact that since Judge Potter wrote, much new material has come to light, his book is of less assistance than would at first be expected. Both these books do scant justice to Atherton's associates, and the same may be said of what Arnold has written on the subject in his "Rhode Island."

Misunderstandings were frequent and charges of corruption or worse have been urged. In 1672 a truce was made. Richard Smith became a Rhode Island assistant and the Atherton deeds were confirmed by that colony in the most positive manner. In 1708, however, this confirmation was disregarded by Rhode Island. Nor do the Atherton proprietors seem to have adhered much better to their side of the bargain, as in 1679 the whole question, on their representations, was reopened, and some years later the district was taken from Rhode Island and given a government of its own. Finally, however, Rhode Island prevailed, but in the meantime the principal land owners in the King's Province had absorbed nearly all the land, for only men of large means and of considerable political power could maintain themselves during the long struggle.

Considering the area of the province the estates were very large. Thus, according to a reliable tradition, the Smiths owned at one time a tract of land nine miles in length, by three in width, while Thomas Stanton is reported to have acquired "a lordship" of some four and a half miles long and two miles wide. Col. Champlin, a neighbor of the Stantons owned two thousand acres, and farms of five, six, and even ten square miles existed. The Pettasquamscot purchasers seem to have divided their lands into moderately small parcels, but towards the middle of the eighteenth century the Robinsons and Hazards appear to have acquired in one way or another very large estates in the midst of the Pettasquamscot country. For example, William Robinson is said to have occupied several thousand acres, while Robert Hazard, "the great farmer" is *estimated* (by a descendant) to have farmed

---

Undoubtedly those speculators showed a grasping spirit in their dealings with the natives, and neither they nor Massachusetts historians who have defended them have done justice to Rhode Island. There are two sides to every dispute, and it may pertinently be asked if the time has not come when the matter, in justice to both parties, can be viewed like any other historical problem, in an historical way and not as a matter of sentiment.

as much as twelve thousand acres—a large proportion of which was probably fitted for sheep walks and pasturage rather than for agriculture.

Of course in the lapse of time these great estates became divided, but not to such an extent as would have been the case elsewhere. In the first place, the real estate of a debtor actually residing in Rhode Island could not be attached for debt. In the second place, although a man could leave his property by will to whomsoever he chose, yet if he died intestate the whole realty descended to the eldest son, by the well-known rule of English common law. In 1718, an act was passed diminishing the share of the eldest son. But ten years later this law was repealed as, according to the preamble of the repealing act, it tended to destroy inheritances. Probably the influence of this rule of primogeniture has been much exaggerated. In fact, the large estates, while remaining to a great extent in the families of the original purchasers from the natives, seem to have been divided in a more or less equitable fashion.

The local and colonial importance of these Narragansett landowners was greatly enhanced by the political power which they, as freeholders, enjoyed under Rhode Island law. In the other New England colonies, especially in New Haven before its absorption by Connecticut, there were great and, from some points of view, very oppressive restrictions on the exercise of the suffrage. But these restrictions were mainly of a religious character. They can hardly be said to have originated in any social differences though they undoubtedly produced such distinctions. In Rhode Island, however, after 1663,[1] no man could become a freeman and have a voice in

[1] I have not cited the acts upon which this section is based, owing to the fact that such references would be of little value to any one, unless he had access to the particular editions of Acts and Laws which I have used. The acts can be found easily enough, however, through the tables attached to the different editions of Rhode Island statutes.

town or colony affairs, unless he was of "competent estate." What constituted a "competent estate" does not seem to have been ascertained by law until 1729. In that year it was enacted that no one should be admitted to the freedom of a town unless he possessed a freehold to the value of £200—a considerable sum in 1729—or of the annual value of £10. The smaller land owners, mechanics and tradesmen were thus disfranchised. Some years later the minimum valuation was increased to £400, but owing to the depreciation of Rhode Island currency the increase was more fictitious than real. This limitation of the suffrage does not appear to have been strictly observed by the freemen, as in 1742 an act was passed to the effect that no person could vote as a freeman unless he possessed a freehold of the required value. Authority was given to anyone to challenge the vote of any person claiming to be a freeman. The eldest sons of freemen, however, possessed *ipso facto* the right to vote as fully as if they themselves and not their fathers were freeholders. Now, in the Narragansett towns the number of freeholders was very small and in this way whatever power belonged to the local authorities was exercised by the local magnates. To fully understand the meaning of this we must study the peculiarities of the Rhode Island town system.[1]

Like those of the neighboring colonies the Rhode Island towns enjoyed the right to make such by-laws "as should be necessary for the management, rule, and ordering of all prudential affairs." In fact the town was as much a unit as the town of the Bay colony. But there the resemblance ceases, for, as we have just seen, these by-laws were made by a few men whom worldly prosperity had enfranchised.

[1] The following extract from the Records of South Kingstown shows that disputes as to the exercise of the right to vote were not infrequent. It was in 1753 that certain men were appointed to "view and estimate the value of estates of those who shall present themselves in order to be made freemen of the town when a dispute shall arise as to the value of their freehold."

The administrative functions were confided to a body which may be said to form a connecting link between the Massachusetts board of select men and the select vestry of Virginia. This was the town-council. It was composed of a small number of men annually selected by the freemen out of their own number and of such justices, wardens and assistants as happened to reside in the town. In the old time the justices were annually selected by the Assembly and commissioned by the governor, while the assistants were elected by an election of two degrees. Thus the constitution of the town council was different from that of the board of selectmen, all of whom were elected by the qualified voters in town meeting. In fact, it differed from the select vestry of Virginia only in being annually renewed, and an examination of the records shows that in Narragansett the same men often served for many years.

The authority of this town council, too, was much more extensive than that of the selectmen. It acted, and does to this day, as a court of probate, with an appeal, however, except in the early times, to the Superior Court. The town council had the absolute disposal of all questions of settlement. It could prohibit any new comer from settling within the town limits; and if its commands were not obeyed it could order the proper officer to remove the persistent immigrant. Then, again, the town council had exceptionally large powers with regard to the laying out and building of all roads, whether town ways or county turnpikes.[1] In this respect it had more power than even the select

[1] Labor on the roads was provided in Narragansett as in Massachusetts, Virginia and England. The following from South Kingstown Records, under date of 1724, is evidence on this point, and also as showing the value of a man's labor: "Voted that the fines on them that refuse or neglect to work on his Majesty's highways in said town when legally warned there to shall for the future be 3 sh. per day for a single hand, and for the neglect of a cart and team with one hand, the fine shall be 7 sh. 6 d. for each day's neglect."

vestry. One of the results of this extension of local authority, to what in other colonies was a county matter, was that sometimes the roads between two towns did not meet. Except in the earlier days there was no jury as in Massachusetts, but the town council appointed three disinterested persons, who, with a justice of the peace and a constable or town-sergeant, laid out the road and assessed the damages. It is true that if any one felt aggrieved he could appeal to a jury, but this was a right to be seldom resorted to, as, if the jury decided against the appellant, he was obliged to pay all the costs of the appeal. The other duties of the council were not unlike those of the Massachusetts selectmen and need no description here.

Enough has been said to show that there was every reason why the Narragansett freeholders, possessing as they did a political influence unique in the institution of colonial New England, should, other conditions being favorable, develop into a distinct class.

The prominent position which the Episcopal Church occupied in the social organization of the old South County has not been exaggerated. But that position was due in great part to the exertions of McSparran, and it should be borne in mind that the lines upon which Narragansett society was to develop were laid down before McSparran—the first successful missionary whom the Venerable Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts sent to the King's Province—arrived at Kingstown, and certainly long before he acquired much influence in the community. Many persons, ignoring the early history of the Narragansett country, seem to take it for granted that the progenitors of the great families were Episcopalians. Such, however, was not the case. We are told, for instance, that the elder Richard Smith possessed a conscience too tender for the English Gloucestershire or the Old Colony Taunton. He sought refuge in the Narragansett wilderness where he bought and hired large tracts of land from the

natives and opened a trading house for their convenience.[1] His son Major Richard Smith, who joined him in 1659, had served, if tradition is correct, as an officer in Cromwell's victorious army.[2] Assuredly neither of them was the man to entertain a kindly feeling towards Episcopacy. Their early neighbors and associates were either fellow-members of the Atherton Company or men sent out by it, and they hailed, almost to a man, from Massachusetts or Connecticut, where the English Church of the Restoration was regarded with almost as much horror as the "Babylonian woe" itself. So much for the religious opinions of the fathers of North Kingstown.

As to the founders of South Kingstown—the Pettasquamscot Purchasers, so-called—their adherence to the Congregational form was so clearly proven that the English Privy Council[3] in the middle of the eighteenth century decided that the phrase "an orthodox person that shall be obtained to preach God's word to the inhabitants," which occurs in one of their early votes as descriptive of the person who should have the use of a valuable farm, meant Congregational and not Episcopal. In fact, the word "orthodox" was used in this vote as descriptive of Congregational, that being the orthodox faith in the

---

[1] Cf. Letter of Roger Williams in Potter's Early History of Narragansett, R. I. Hist. Soc. Coll., III., p. 166.

[2] Paper labelled: "James Updike's Recollections" among the Manuscripts which Mr. D. B. Updike, now of Boston, inherited from his grandfather, the learned author of The Narragansett Church. Mr. Updike, with true Rhode Island courtesy, allowed me to inspect these manuscripts which are cited here as Updike Papers.

[3] This lawsuit so famous in the history of Rhode Island, and, indeed, of New England, has never been adequately described. Updike ("Narragansett Church," pp. 68–82) has something about it. Judge Potter (R. I. Hist., Soc. Coll., III., pp. 123–130) gives a brief and unsatisfactory account of it. In the Prince Library, now on deposit in the Boston Public Library, there is a manuscript volume labelled Torrey Papers. It contains copies of a very large number of the documents which passed in the various suits about this land. Others will be found among the Court Records at Kingston. Cf. Prince Catalogue under Torrey Papers.

minds of the voters. No better proof of the anti-Episcopalian leanings of the founders of South Kingstown could be desired, as by this decision the King in Council deprived the Episcopal McSparran of the use of what he had fondly hoped would prove to be a valuable glebe.

The strength of the Friends in early Narragansett cannot be so easily ascertained. The first Robinson and the early Hazards were of that persuasion, but unfortunately the records of the South Kingstown Monthly Meeting, which might have thrown some light on the question, were destroyed by fire more than a hundred years ago, and up to the present writing I have not been able to get reliable information on the point.[1]

A Baptist congregation was gathered in what is now North Kingstown, at an early day, and a Presbyterian church had been founded in the southern portion of the then town of Kingstown before the end of the 17th century. But until the arrival of Mr. Niles in 1702[2] there seems to have been no settled minister in the place. Roger Williams preached to the assembled Indians and English at a much earlier date,[3] and other godly men at one time or another ministered to the spiritual needs of the Narragansett people, but there was no regular preaching there before the coming of Niles. This is dwelt on here as being a remarkable fact even for Rhode Island, where great freedom was allowed in religious matters.

---

[1] The Records of the New England Yearly Meeting (1685–1787) are at the Friends' School in Providence; those of the R. I. Quarterly Meeting are in the hands of Samuel R. Buffington, of Fall River, Mass., and the later records of South Kingstown Monthly Meeting are in the possession of William Y. Collins, of Hope Valley, R. I.

[2] Cf.—Deposition of Samuel Niles in the "great lawsuit," preserved among the Torrey Papers in the Prince Library, now on deposit in the Boston Public Library. See also Updike's Narragansett Church, p. 35 *et seq.*

[3] Cf.—A Summary View of the Religious State of the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations from A. D. 1636–1774—among the Stiles MSS. now in the library of the Mass. Hist. Soc. See also R. I. Hist. Soc. Coll., VII., p. 65.

Mr. Niles remained in the Narragansett country for a few years and, after his retirement, the pulpit remained unoccupied until 1732, when the Rev. Joseph Torrey took charge of the congregation. At first the society flourished under his fostering hand, for Mr. Torrey was a man of uncommon energy and pluck, as his successful opposition of the "litigious McSparran"—as Stiles maliciously called that worthy—plainly shows. In the early years of his pastorate his hearers numbered among them many of the most important men of the town; but, towards the end of his life the attendance fell off and at his death the society became practically extinct.[1]

Far different is the history of the Episcopal Church. Like their Congregational rivals, its early ministers found little to encourage them in the listlessness of the great farmers;[2] but, from the day that McSparran appeared in their midst, until thirty-six years later he met with a painful accident which proved fatal,[3] the English Church flourished and grew until it had conquered for itself a place among the institutions of the South County. Nevertheless its presence there does not account for the peculiar social features of the community in which it obtained so firm a foothold that even the Revolution

---

[1] Cf.—Updike's Narragansett Church, p. 117, and Stiles's Summary View as above.

In 1753 there was still a puritanical spirit among the Narragansett people, for in that year eight men were chosen "First day constables to keep good order on the first day of the week."

[2] McSparran's America Dissected, in Updike's Narragansett Church, p. 511; also Potter in R. I. Hist. Soc. Coll., III., p. 133.

[3] This deplorable event is thus described in a manuscript entitled "Reminiscences" for the use of which I am again indebted to the descendant of the learned author of the Narragansett Church. The story is as follows: "Dr. McSparran caught his death at father's. He went to prayer and had read and was going to kneel and being a fat heavy man and putting his hands on the table to ease himself down the table split off and his weight came down and he hit the edge of his eyebrow against the sharp edge of the table leg and he bled profusely—but he would have nothing done until he had finished his prayer. They bound it up and he got home and never recovered. My father watched with him when he died."

could not shake it. It was because the Episcopal form was well suited to the time and the place that it became almost the established church of the country, and added a pleasing color to the social life of the Narragansett farmers.

To sum up, in colonial Narragansett the nature and constitution of the place, the extension of slavery, both of negroes and Indians, the mode of colonization, the political predominance enjoyed by freeholders in Rhode Island, were all favorable to the production of a state of society which has no parallel in New England. That these causes did produce such a result no one who has carefully studied the early records can deny.